

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, April 23, 1917

Beinn Bhreagh, near Baddeck, Nova Scotia. 1917 April 24 Mrs Alexander Graham Bell
1331 Connecticut Avenue Washington D C Dear Mabel:—

Just received your two notes April 20 one of them containing your patriotic appeal “To the Women of America”, and have just sent you the following night letter:

“Baddeck N S April 24 1917: To Mrs Alexander Graham Bell 1331 Connecticut Avenue Washington DC. Gauldrie launched yesterday and will soon be in condition for towing experiments. No chance of my returning for some time. Better send on that census document if DeLand thinks advisable. Just received your patriotic appeal to the Women of America. It is great and I am proud of you.”

(signed) ALEC

I really think that is a very fine thing — that appeal of yours — and presents a new and important argument in favour of Universal service.

There should be no discrimination in taxes to support the Government and there should be no discrimination in the obligation to support one's country. There should be universal military training; and there should be universal service for one's country — not necessarily military service, but whatever service one is able to perform. The raising of food is as of much consequence as military service and the mobilization of industries too is required as a basis of support. Every one should be under obligation to do what he can for his country without discrimination of age or sex and the Government should have the deciding voice as to what particular class of work may be of most benefit to the country.

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In regard to military service there is one point that has never been publically alluded too so far as I know. A volunteer army injures the people from which it springs by the fact that the deaths are confined to a selected class of good and fit men thus reducing the proportion of such men who will be the fathers of the next generation. Whereas an army that constitutes an average sample of the population would not cause deterioration of the nation because, however, it might be reduced by deaths the proportion of fit and unfit would remain the same.

A country that wages war for a number of successive generations by means of volunteer armies drawn from the best in the nation must necessarily deteriorate by the continious production of a smaller and smaller proportion of good and fit men and a larger and larger proportion of unfit.

History points to the rapid decadence of the military powers of the past. I see no reason however, for thinking that there would be decadence in a military power employing armies constituting an average sample of the population and not a sample of men selected for superior vigor and abilities.

I am very anxious to get on with towing experiments and of course I cannot even consider the idea of returning to Washington now that we have open water and motor boats available for the purpose. The Gauldrie was only launched yesterday and her engine is not yet in good running order. I hope however we may be able to do something with her tomorrow.

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I propose first to tow a few of our ordinary boats so as to obtain the resistance curve for normal boats. Then we will try the form of float used in Florida. I have examined the records of towing experiments made here in 1914 but can find no records of curved hydro-surfaces like those employed in the Florida model.

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The floats to be made here will be much larger than those made in Washington so as to give us greater pulls and more decisive results. If the experiments are satisfactory, and, from past experience in experimentation, I presume they will not be then more experimentation will be made to remedy observed defects. If on the other hand they should turn out to be satisfactory then I could arrange with Mr Baldwin to build an actual boat and there would then be no reason why I should not return to Washington while the boat is being constructed.

I dread the long journey however, and feel it would be wiser to consider that I am here for the season.

I am anxious to know what that census document is about and hope you may send it on.

AGB